21. (original) A method according to claim 20, wherein the reaction is performed according to the Mitsonobu reaction protocol, to yield an ester derivative of the 3β-hydroxy-5β-H steroidal sapogenin.

22. (original) A method according to claim 20, wherein the activated derivative of the sapogenin is an organic sulphonated derivative.

23. (original) A method for the synthesis of smilagenin, comprising catalytic hydrogenation of diosgenone followed by reduction of the resulting 3-keto, 5β-H steroidal sapogenin using a hindered organoborane.

24. (original) A method for the synthesis of epismilagenin, comprising catalytic hydrogenation of diosgenone followed by reduction of the resulting 3-keto,5β-H steroidal sapogenin using anorganoalumino-. hydride.

25. (currently amended) A method according to ~~any one of the preceding claims~~claim 20, wherein a sapogenin initially formed is subsequently converted to a pro-drug form thereof or to another physiologically acceptable form thereof.

Respectfully submitted,

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